



The Solarium Lofts... The First Loft & Green Project in Aruba

Gabriel Duarte (36) is the man behind The Solarium Lofts. The Solarium is the first loft project in Aruba and is also 'going green'. Duarte is President of New Frontier Residences, the group behind several real estate developments in the Dutch Caribbean of which The Solarium is the first initiative in Aruba. The property will consist of 4 high-end lofts and 4 penthouses and will be erected in the area of Meiveld. Florin had a brief Q & A session with Duarte.

Florin: Tell us a little bit about the person behind The Solarium?

Gabriel Duarte: I was born and raised in Venezuela, my parents are from Cuba though. Since the early seventies my parents became familiar with the Dutch Caribbean and in particular with Aruba. My father has invested from that period on in real estate in Aruba besides his real estate activities in Caracas. The former Atlantis Apartments was one of his projects in Aruba. I have been visiting and living in Aruba for the last 30 years and I love it. I was always - obviously through my father - interested in real estate.

Florin: Do you think there is room for another - in this case loft - condominium project?

Gabriel Duarte: I am an optimist at heart. Despite the substantial increase in condominium projects the last couple of years as well as the recent economic uncertainties, Aruba remains a very interesting and dynamic market. Bear in mind that the Solarium is the first loft project in Aruba with interesting 'green' elements to make it - as much as possible - environment friendly.

Florin: Why go Loft and Green?

Gabriel Duarte: I love the (life) style and design of Loft in general. It's contemporary and very different to all existing and approved traditional condominium projects in Aruba. We wanted it to be environmental friendly because

it is the right thing to do! We will use specialized building materials to isolate the outside structure of the building, so called 'humid barriers'. Solar panels will be used to generate as much as power as possible and will form an integral part of the air conditioning system. The air conditioning will be based on a technology in which we will use cold artesian aquifer water (brackish groundwater) - which will be drilled, isolated and pumped on site at an average dept of 60 feet - to feed the cooling towers. This technology is unique for Aruba. The initial investment for us and the buyers will be higher, but the investment will pay for itself within 7 to 8 years. The water coming out of the cooling tower will be re-used for the pool, for irrigation and other useful purposes within each loft unit. Utility expenses for the owners will drop dramatically; we all know how expensive these are. Also bear in mind that all these investments will increase the (market) value of the property substantially.

Florin: How much are you going to spend and who designed the project?

Gabriel Duarte: It will cost me around AWG 4 million. The selling prices will start at USD 300,000 for a one-bedroom penthouse. The biggest loft will have an area of approximately 180 square meters. The architectural design is in the very capable hands of Greg Lacle of ABJL & Partners. Amenities will include among other things a luxurious pool / Jacuzzi on the second floor, a gym, a playground and a reception area.

Florin: Who are the prospective buyers? When will construction start?

Gabriel Duarte: The local and international professionals. We will start construction in May next year and finish in November.

For more information:
<http://www.thesolariumlofts.com>
or (297) 594-9493.

Do you own a Loft or a Condo?

Differences Between Lofts and Condominiums

The big differences between condos and traditional lofts are questions of style and use. Lofts, with their soaring ceilings, wide open spaces and modern finishes such as concrete, granite, hardwood and stainless steel, offer a sense of authenticity and originality to many buyers. The prototypical loft was a conversion of a formerly industrial or historical building in an urban/transitional area, and offered native architectural elements such as massive structural concrete columns - though nowadays many lofts are built from the ground up. Condos and town homes, on the other hand, are usually built new, and while they may incorporate design elements of lofts, are closer in spirit to single family homes: room divisions, at least 1 and a half baths, often with wall-to-wall carpet and more traditionally designed kitchens. Some condominiums have more amenities than lofts; gyms, pools, more extensive landscaping, concierge service in the higher end properties.

The most important distinction (in North America) between lofts and condos is that some lofts are zoned as "live/work" while condos are strictly residential.

Why are lofts so popular?

Lofts have a certain allure. With high ceilings, open floor plans, rough-hewn floors, and brick walls, they are a hip housing alternative for many urban professionals. There are also very practical reasons why a loft would appeal to many as moving to an urban apartment is about tapping into the excitement and cultural opportunities of the big city and can also mean a shorter commute to work.

What's the mystery / history of lofts?

One great definition for a loft found on the Web is - An appeal against conven-

tion - convention in thinking, convention in building and convention in living. They are a celebration of open concept living and unconventional spaces brought about by the considered application of imagination and a rejection of mass-market housing.

The origin of the word Loft comes from the Old Norse lopt, which means upper room or air. In 19th Century English usage the word came to mean *the upper stories of a warehouse or factory*. The modern boom in the conversion of such spaces into living areas came in the 1940s in the SoHo District of New York City. By the 1970s so many of these conversions had been done that the city was forced to re-zone the area to make such conversions legal.

By the 1980s the concept was spreading first across the United States and then to Europe and Asia. As the trend grew it caught the attention of developers identifying a new market. Developers being developers did not let a lack of owning an existing warehouse or factory building to convert stop them from moving into the new market. Thus the new word Loft began to be applied to units in ground up new construction. Needless to say the term grew fuzzy.

By 2005 the term "Loft" had matured. Lofts created from spaces in existing buildings are called *hard lofts* or *true lofts*. Lofts built new from the ground up are typically referred to as *soft lofts* or *new lofts* or *loft-inspired* or *mezzanine suites*. Whether created out of an existing building or built new from the ground up, all lofts have certain common elements or they are not lofts.

Lofts are part of the Postmodernism movement in architecture. Postmodernism is a counter-reaction to the strict and almost universal modernism of the mid-20th Century. It embraces elements from historical building styles incorporating them without a rigid adherence to one style. It also does not try to hide the structural or mechanical elements of a building but often uses these in the design.

The Solarium Lofts

Here are some of the unique joys of the loft life:

- Industrial buildings - The term loft began in New York and Chicago when renters and owners began turning old industrial buildings into living spaces. The original tenants were artists who craved the high ceilings, large windows and open floor plans typical of converted warehouses and factories.
- Open spaces - The primary benefit of loft living is the large open spaces that allow you to live and move how you want, rather than having your movement defined by a permanent floor plan of walls, doorways and rooms.
- Define your areas - In a loft, the floor plan can be fluid and ever changing. You can set up a sleeping area in one part of the space, then move it somewhere else if you have guests or if you just need the area for another use. Kitchens and bathrooms are more permanent, of course, but temporary partitions, hanging curtains, or even changes in floor covering can define other spaces.
- Eclectic style - Another nice aspect of many lofts is the opportunity for eclectic design and decorating. For example, a loft might feature soft, delicate window treatments on reinforced factory windows, or a modern couch sitting on a hundred-year-old hardwood floor. This mixture of old with new and practicality with comfort can form a wonderful esthetic that makes the most of a loft's mixed-use nature.

Basic common elements of a loft:

- Open, flowing floor plans either on one floor or multiple levels;
- Minimal uses of interior walls to define space and doors to close off areas;
- High ceilings - some definitions set minimum ceiling heights at twelve feet or it is not a loft just a condo with high ceilings;
- Exposed piping, ductwork, structural elements;
- Large expansive windows & lots of light;
- Access to the sky often with roof top gardens or decks;
- Easily merges living and work space, blurring the lines between workplace and residence;
- Mixes traditional mediums with modern finishes using concrete, metal, stone, brick, wood used freely alongside drywall, ceramic tile and vinyl & other materials available.

